



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D C 20548

088955

RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

MAY 22 1972

Dear Mr. Edminster

We have reviewed the real property management operations of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). Our review was concerned primarily with the accountability for and control, construction, utilization, and disposition of real property.

We examined laws, regulations, and records relating to ARS real property management operations and interviewed ARS officials and officials of the General Services Administration (GSA). Most of our work was done at ARS in Hyattsville, Maryland, and the Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Maryland. In addition we visited the ARS Management Services and Finance Divisions located in New Orleans, Louisiana, and ARS research facilities at Wyndmoor and University Park, Pennsylvania, and Georgetown, Delaware

On the basis of our review, we concluded that ARS needs to establish procedures to ensure that, in accordance with Federal Property Management Regulations, real property holdings are reviewed annually to identify those no longer needed or not being put to optimum use so they can be made available for use by other agencies.

This matter is discussed below.

NEED TO IDENTIFY UNNEEDED
FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

The Federal Property Management Regulations require that each executive agency, commencing with fiscal year 1971, make an annual review of its property to determine whether any portion of its property is not utilized, is underutilized, or is not being put to optimum use. When an agency determines that property or a portion of property under its control is not utilized, the regulations require the agency to either release the property or, upon determination by the head of the agency, hold it for a foreseeable future program use. A GSA official told us that agencies are required also to notify GSA if property being held for future use can be made available for temporary use by others.

ARS officials told us that, although ARS real property holdings were reviewed periodically, they were not aware of the requirements

088955

913788

for the annual review contained in the Federal Property Management Regulations. Accordingly ARS had not complied with the requirements. Further an ARS official told us that ARS does not have a policy requiring that GSA be notified if temporary space is available.

We were provided with copies of reports of a fiscal year 1971 review of real property holdings submitted to the ARS Administrative Services Division by other divisions of ARS in compliance with a 1965 ARS administrative memorandum. This memorandum required reviews of real property holdings primarily to identify and report excess property. It did not require reporting property being underutilized or not being put to optimum use. Therefore, even though ARS had many research facilities which were understaffed as of June 30, 1971, none of the reports we reviewed identified these facilities as being underutilized.

We made a limited review of understaffed ARS facilities to determine if space was available that could be utilized by other agencies and whether efforts were being made to make such space available. The enclosure to this report lists six examples of facilities where space was available which we believe could have been utilized by other agencies.

In two of these cases, another agency was leasing space near the underutilized facilities and apparently was not aware that ARS space was available. In the other cases, the agencies were aware of the available space and had requested its use but were denied by ARS officials for various reasons. The major reason cited for not making the space available was that the space was being held for future program use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that ARS establish procedures for reviewing its real property holdings to identify unneeded property or property not being put to optimum use. We recommend also that ARS establish procedures for notifying GSA, through the Department's Office of Plant and Operations, of any real property being held for future use which can be made available for temporary use by others.

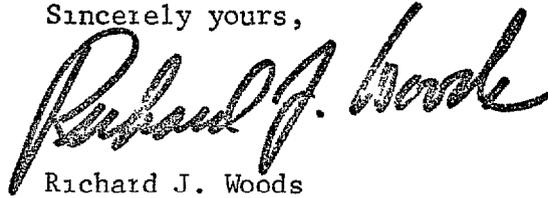
- - - -

We would appreciate your comments and advice as to any action taken or planned on our recommendations. We will be pleased to discuss the matters covered in this report with you or your staff if you desire.

We wish to acknowledge the courtesies and cooperation extended to our representatives during the review

Copies of this letter are being sent to the Assistant Secretary for Administration and the Inspector General, Department of Agriculture, and to the Commissioner, Property Management and Disposal Service, GSA.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard J. Woods". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Richard J. Woods
Assistant Director

Enclosure

Mr. T. W. Edminster, Administrator
Agricultural Research Service
Department of Agriculture

SUMMARY OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE (ARS) RESEARCH FACILITIES
REVIEWED WHERE AVAILABLE SPACE COULD HAVE BEEN UTILIZED BY OTHER AGENCIES

<u>ARS facility</u> <u>location and purpose</u>	<u>Utilization</u> (note a)		<u>Background on agency which</u> <u>may be able to utilize space</u>	<u>Comments</u>
	<u>Planned</u> <u>capacity</u> (SMY) (note b)	<u>Occupancy</u> (SMY)		
Georgetown, Delaware Poultry research	6	3	<p>The ARS Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) Research Division has staff located in a house trailer across the road from the Georgetown facility. The remainder of the SWC research team is located in Norfolk, Virginia.</p> <p>SWC is working on problems associated with the disposal of wastes in the Delmarva Peninsula area</p> <p>Because primary laboratory facilities are located at Norfolk, the SWC staff at Georgetown must travel at least once a week to Norfolk to deliver samples for testing and obtain test results.</p> <p>According to an SWC official, SWC would need one laboratory and office space for two scientists at Georgetown in order to consolidate staff. SWC would continue to use the house trailer for part of its staff</p>	<p>SWC requested space at Georgetown on January 15, 1971. The request was rejected by ARS on February 3, 1971. Reasons cited for not providing space were that all laboratories were expected to be in use by July 1, 1971, and it was hoped that complete staffing of the laboratory would be accomplished during the latter part of 1972</p> <p>Our visit to this facility on January 21, 1972, showed that the facility was understaffed and had space which we believe could be made available to others on a temporary basis. Two of the five laboratories were vacant.</p> <p>Based on discussions with officials of the SWC Division and the Poultry Research Division, we believe that ARS should give consideration to making space available to SWC</p>

SUMMARY OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE (ARS) RESEARCH FACILITIES
REVIEWED WHERE AVAILABLE SPACE COULD HAVE BEEN UTILIZED BY OTHER AGENCIES (Continued)

<u>ARS facility location and purpose</u>	<u>Utilization (note a)</u>		<u>Background on agency which may be able to utilize space</u>	<u>Comments</u>
	<u>Planned capacity (SMY) (note b)</u>	<u>Occupancy (SMY)</u>		
Gainesville, Florida Insect attractants and stored product insects research	36	15	The Food and Nutrition Service, Department of Agriculture, is leasing 600 square feet of office space in Gainesville at a cost of \$2,526 a year for three people. The lease does not expire until 1974	The Food and Nutrition Service requested space for three people at the Gainesville facility in the spring of 1971. We were advised that the request was rejected by the director of the laboratory because ARS had future plans for this space. Although space was still available as of February 4, 1972, we did not find any evidence to indicate ARS attempted to determine if space could be made available on a temporary basis.
Athens, Georgia Southeastern agricultural research	158	85	The Plant Protection and Quarantine Division is leasing 295 square feet of office space in Athens at a cost of \$1,045 a year for two people	A Department official told us that he knew no reason why the two people stationed at the leased facility could not be transferred to the ARS laboratory at Athens We could not find any indication that consideration is being given to such a transfer.

SUMMARY OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE (ARS) RESEARCH FACILITIES
REVIEWED WHERE AVAILABLE SPACE COULD HAVE BEEN UTILIZED BY OTHER AGENCIES (Continued)

<u>ARS facility.</u> <u>location and purpose</u>	<u>Utilization</u> <u>(note a)</u>		<u>Background on agency which</u> <u>may be able to utilize space</u>	<u>Comments</u>
	<u>Planned</u> <u>capacity</u> <u>(SMY)</u> <u>(note b)</u>	<u>Occupancy</u> <u>(SMY)</u>		
Oxford, Mississippi National Sedimenta- tion Laboratory	16	6	The Food and Nutrition Service is leasing 630 square feet of office space in Oxford at a cost of \$2,220 a year for three people	The Director of the Oxford Laboratory advised us on February 10, 1972, that currently there are six offices and six laboratories not being fully utilized. This space is apparently being held for future program use. We could not find any evidence to indicate that ARS was attempting to make space available on a temporary basis.
Peoria, Illinois Utilization research	60	12	The Food and Nutrition Service is leasing 625 square feet of office space in Peoria at a cost of \$1,612 a year for three people	The Director of the Peoria Laboratory advised us on February 9, 1972, that available space is scattered in various parts of the building and that physical arrangement of the office space would make use by an agency with unrelated activities difficult. We were unable to find that a determination was made that space could be made available to others. Possible consolidation of activities in the building could result in identification of unneeded space and the greater chance of making the space available to others

SUMMARY OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE (ARS) RESEARCH FACILITIES
REVIEWED WHERE AVAILABLE SPACE COULD HAVE BEEN UTILIZED BY OTHER AGENCIES (Continued)

<u>ARS facility location and purpose</u>	<u>Utilization (note a)</u>		<u>Background on agency which may be able to utilize space</u>	<u>Comments</u>
	<u>Planned capacity (SMY) (note b)</u>	<u>Occupancy (SMY)</u>		
Beltsville, Maryland Hayden Farm Tract	Not utilized		An official of the Environmental Protection Agency told us that the Agency needs a farm to conduct pesticide research. This official also advised us that the Hayden Farm Tract could be used for this research.	The Environmental Protection Agency requested use of this tract in the summer of 1971. ARS officials told us that the property located at Beltsville is being reviewed by the Real Property Review Board and that no action would be taken on the Environmental Protection Agency's request until the review is completed.

^aInformation based on schedule showing staffing status of research facilities as of November 30, 1971, provided by ARS and discussions with ARS officials.

^bScientific man-year (one SMY represents one research scientist).